

**Testimony to the Appropriations Committee
In Support of Funding for After School Programs**

February 21, 2013

*Submitted by Suzannah Holsenbeck,
Arts Director, Cooperative Arts & Humanities High School, New Haven, CT*

Good evening members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Suzannah Holsenbeck and I am the Arts Director of Cooperative Arts and Humanities Magnet High School in New Haven, CT, one of only two public visual and performing arts high schools in the state.

I am here on behalf of the 300 high school students at Co-Op who voluntarily participate in after school programming made possible by the state-funded After School Grant Program. I urge you to reinstate the 4.5 million dollars that was completely cut from Governor Malloy's budget so that our youth across the state may continue to benefit from programming that provides them with academic, artistic, and college-going experiences so crucial to closing the achievement gap.

Just as I am here for the hundreds of students, teachers and families that benefit from quality programming, I am here for the individuals who have state-funded after school programs to thank for where they are in life. I am here for James who could have been another statistic related to the gun violence endemic to our cities but is now enrolled in an associates degree program and working part time because he had a safe place to be after school; I am here for Eddie who won a full scholarship to college because of a playwriting program he enrolled in after school; I am here for Ms. Katz who is able to make mortgage payments on her house because she teaches an after school college essay writing class that helps students get into college.

Our programs allow for students from 20 different Connecticut towns and cities to learn together and overcome their differences. We have proven through our attendance and participation numbers that successful high school after school programming is not only possible but essential to keeping our students safe, giving them authentic learning experiences and educating the future leaders of our communities in creative and vibrant ways not afforded to them during the school day.

When approximately 1 in 5 students in Connecticut are at risk of dropping out of high school, how can we ignore a program that actively helps to keep students in school and engaged in their learning? The benefits of dynamic after school programming are hard to ignore: 42% of the students who participated in our 2012 programming said that our after school programs were the reason they showed up to school every day. Likewise, 34% of our students strongly agreed when asked if after school had a positive impact on their grades and academic achievement. Moreover, students report feeling more excited and interested in going to college as

a result of their interactions with the college students who work in a wide variety of our after school programs.

Furthermore, state grant funding allows us to maintain a programming infrastructure that allows for rich partnerships with local and state organizations, such as Yale University, The Connecticut Center for Non-Violence and the Shubert Theater. Our program alone employs approximately 50 adults and draws countless more volunteers.

Please consider all the voices you hear tonight and in the months ahead and reinstate the state-funded After School Grant Program. As you can see, the impact of this crucial funding cannot be understated. Thank you for your time this evening.